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A Letter From a Young Woman · 1830.

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to
a Member of the Religious Society of Friends.
with his Reply.

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A

LETTER

FROM

A YOUNG WOMAN

TO

A MEMBER OF THE RELIGIOUS
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, (*Hicksite?*)

WITH

HIS REPLY.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN TOWNSEND,
No. 94 NORTH FIFTH STREET.
John Richards, Printer.
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A LETTER, &c.

IT has been said, "uncommon times demand uncommon deeds." In taking up the pen to address Dr. ——, I am actuated alone by that sincere regard for his character, which induces me earnestly to desire his immortal welfare. A mind brought to the knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus, looks round upon a dear deluded multitude taken captive in the snares of Satan, and while it offers unto heaven the overflowing tribute of gratitude for its own deliverance, earnestly desires to make some feeble effort towards leading others also to sound the notes of kindred praise, and to join in ascribing salvation unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. O! Dr. ——! the individual who now ventures to address you, is one, who feels as if her feeble pleading could scarcely be heard amid the throng of unbelievers around you. She has no personal acquaintance with you—she never listened to your conversation on general topics, and probably never may, at any future period. But she has seen you at the couch of sickness; she has seen you, by the benignant smile of sympathy, soothing the suffering invalid, and with accents of sweetness, cheering the room of sorrow. And, oh! I have said, shall such a mind be inveigled into those absurdities and awful delusions, as ridiculous to every truly sober understanding as they are dreadful to the view of any Christian! Shall such a mind be led captive in the most fearful species of enthralment, that of blasphemy and infidelity under the imposing garb of the most refined spirituality—of the most professedly sublime and elevated religion! Shall such a mind be indeed so far drawn away as to reject the atonement of that blessed and kind Redeemer, who shed his blood for the remission of sins; and be so far deceived into that rejection, as to admit the assertion, that an outward offering cannot

purify the soul! O! Dr. ——! if you value your immortal welfare, if you dread eternal ruin, return! return! or rather, let old things be passed away, and all things become new—not on the ground of your original principles, which must fall before sound reason or correct investigation, but on the firm basis of Scripture truth! It is never derogatory to a truly great mind to own that it has been mistaken. Dare to think, and to search—not by setting up some unhappy chimera, called inward revelation, for your guide, but by being outward enough to devote yourself to the prayerful study of holy Scripture, with earnest application through the blood of the covenant, for the enlightening of renewing grace! A mind like yours ought to be devoted to the cause of that Redeemer whose name it would so truly adorn. I have spoken the truth to you fearlessly; but I desire to speak it in that love, in which I fear you too seldom hear it. Think not any thing about the poor, weak instrument, through which this call is sent you—think only of the earnest invitation it contains, to come, taste, and see that the Lord is gracious.

There is no way but the blood of Jesus, whereby to enter the holy of holies. That you may earnestly seek to find that for yourself, the new and living way, and that you may enter therein, is the ardent desire, and has been the prayer of one who bears the reproach of Christ as a contemned outward Presbyterian.

THE REPLY.

My esteemed young friend—for so I can truly call thee—I have received thy letter through my friend E. M.—. It breathes a spirit of sincerity and a pious desire for my immortal welfare, which I can assure thee I reciprocate.

Happy is that mind that is really brought to the knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus. I can agree with thee, that it looks around upon a deluded multitude with feelings of concern and sorrow. So far as my experience has extended, my

sorrow is not so much on account of absurdities and delusions on matters of religious opinion, according to my standard of judgment; but it is on account of the actions of many professing Christians: for persons of sober understanding may entertain very different views as to what it is that constitutes the ridiculous and dreadful to any Christian. Yet I fully admit that enthralment to be fearful indeed which leads to blasphemy and infidelity under the imposing garb of the most refined spirituality.

I think, if I know my own heart, I humbly desire that old things may pass away, and that all things may become new; and, I may add, all things of God. But I am not yet prepared to regard these old things as the "*original principles*" of the religious Society of Friends; neither can I admit that these principles must fall before sound reason or correct investigation, believing, as I do, that they stand on the firm basis of Scripture truth. As soon as my judgment is convinced to the contrary, I shall be ready to abandon them, and acknowledge that I have been mistaken. While I feel heartily disposed to think and to search, and desire to give to holy Scripture and outward views their just place, yet bear with me, when I say, that to me, inward revelation is not an unhappy chimera, but my anchor of hope in the hour of trial—for through this blessed medium, the soul is at seasons favored to commune with its God.

Some of my ancestors were bright and shining lights in our religious society in the days of the first convincement, when Fox, Penn, Penington, Barclay, and a host of worthies stood forth, as undaunted champions for the truth as it is in Jesus, although assailed by the high professors of their day with the epithets of Deists, Blasphemers, Infidels, &c. &c.

My venerable parents lived to extreme old age, giving ample evidence in life and conversation, that they were disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus. They died in peace. They knew in whom they believed, and they trusted their salvation on a practical conformity to the blessed principle of truth which we profess, and I am also willing to trust mine. They taught me, even in early childhood, to rely on an inward monitor—on the

light of Christ revealed in the soul—as my hope of salvation and glory. This continues to be my unshaken faith—it has grown with my growth, and strengthened with age.

I believe wherever a human soul is to be found, even in the most benighted portions of our globe, there is placed along with it a divine principle of light and truth, altogether sufficient, as it is obeyed, to raise that soul from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and to save it with an everlasting salvation. This is the grace of God which bringeth salvation, and hath appeared to all men. I also believe that the love of our heavenly Father flows equally towards all his children. Where much is given, there much will be required, and where little is given, but little will be required. Those who live in Christian lands, and are favoured with many outward and secondary means of instruction, especially with the Scriptures of truth, will surely have more to answer for in the day of righteous judgment, than the poor untutored natives of our forests, or the Hindoos, the Chinese, the Mahometans, &c. &c.; but surely all these, in common with us, are favoured with the healing virtue of a Saviour's love. These may spiritually touch the garment, for all these have heard the voice of the Son of God, inwardly proclaimed, and if they obey they also shall live.

In the extensive practice of my profession, for many years, I have been accustomed to view poor, frail human nature in its most unveiled forms. The longer I live, the greater is my compassion for erring humanity. I have observed, that in the hour of deep affliction, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Friend, &c. &c., notwithstanding their various modes of faith, all call upon one common God and Father. Among these, none manifest more composure than the Catholic, after confession and absolution by his Priest. Thou wouldest perhaps call him an idolater, when thou saw him with the crucifix, on which his dying eye was reposing with confidence and consolation, as he was passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Were I in the same situation, and the Priest were to offer me similar consolations, I should reject them at once, as "absurd and ridiculous," so far as they related to me. Yet never have I dared, at such a mo-

ment, to attempt to unsettle the mind of a Catholic by an expression of my own religious views. I have also seen the poor despised Jew, calm and resigned on the bed of death, unshaken in the religion of his fathers. Surely these things should teach us a lesson of charity, remembering we are dust.

I have often admired, and been humbled in beholding the simplicity of the Gospel, as taught by our Divine Master. In the first place, he commissioned poor fishermen to be its promulgators. Does he refer us to nice theological distinctions—or are we called upon to test each other by opinions and speculations? Look at his plain directions delivered in his sermon on the mount—hear his positive declarations—“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit; wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” And in the hour of final judgment, on what is that judgment predicated—is it on orthodox opinions, or on practice? “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me, in prison and ye came unto me.”

And now, my esteemed young friend, permit the expression of an earnest desire, that thou and I may be increasingly concerned to retire from the Lo heres and the Lo theres, remembering “the word is nigh in the heart and in the mouth,” and “whatever is known of God is manifest in man.” For my faith is firm, that if we can practise pure and undefiled religion before God the Father; if we visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world; if we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God—although after the manner which some call Heresy, I worship the God of my fathers—believing in the pure and holy doctrines of Christ as set forth in the New Testament, who declared, your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad—Moses and the prophets when wrapped in holy and prophetic vision also beheld it, and exultingly proclaimed the advent of a Messiah—in the fulness of time the heavenly host announced it to the Shepherds of Bethlehem with the angelic anthem, Glory

to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will towards men: if we can only be brought into a state of practical righteousness, combined with humility and sincerity of heart—then I have no doubt when the solemn period arrives, when our immortal spirits will be disrobed of their earthly mantles, however thou and I may differ upon doctrinal points, we shall be permitted to mingle with that great multitude which John saw, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands; who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. We shall join with these in singing the song of the redeemed in that celestial city, where there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; “for the Glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

From the views now unfolded, it will be perceived, although thou art a Presbyterian, and I am a Friend or Quaker, yet with my present feelings, between us there must be no controversy. Claiming sincerity for myself, I award it fully to thee. We both might spend much valuable time in striving to convince each other of the superior excellency of our own religious views, without perhaps advancing one step nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven. Believing as I do on these subjects, I feel no anxiety to call thee to an adoption of my principles, any farther than they would answer to thy own judgment, and conduce to the peace of thy own mind.

When I perceive the bitter fruits which are so often produced by the conflicting opinions of professing Christians, my mind is affected with sorrow, yet it is at seasons consoled by the reflection, that, happily for the human family, they are not to be finally judged by any earthly tribunal, but by a heavenly and compassionate Father, who pities his erring children; who sleeps not by day, nor slumbers by night; but who watches over us for good, and numbers the very hairs of our heads; and although justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, yet thanksgiving and praise be ascribed unto our God, for his mercy endureth forever.



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A letter from a young woman to a me

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